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PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT AS A TOOL IN DISRUPTION OF DRUG TRAFFIC

Problem

One attempt to reduce the "drug problem" is to disrupt or destroy the drug delivery system somewhere between the point of origin and the consumer in the United States thus making the hard drugs less available to the user. Hopefully this intervention would assist in the alleviation of the drug problem, although, of course, it might not lead to its elimination. The purpose of this proposal is to offer a tool which might help in the disruption process.

Background

Psychological assessment of individuals or groups is a technique that has been practiced by psychologists and psychiatrists for a number of years. It generally calls for the administration of a several of psychological tests and face-to-face interviews. The technique is used for a variety of purposes, ranging from the placement of people in appropriate vocational positions to the treatment of people for a variety of neurotic symptoms.

In certain situations it is not possible for the assessors to have direct access to the individual to be assessed. To handle these situations, techniques have been developed to indirectly evaluate individuals or sub-cultural groups. The indirect approach is more difficult and probably less reliable but has been used successfully in several instances. It requires considerable information about the individuals to be assessed such as interviews with people who know them, observations of their behavior under a variety of situations, their physical attributes, etc. The accuracy of the personality picture then drawn is obviously correlated with the quality of this material.

Indirect assessment is generally used to determine how an individual will behave in a face-to-face situation or how he will function in a variety of circumstances. For instance: how will he interact with his peers, subordinates or superiors? How will he react under different environment either cultural or psychological? How will he behave under stress? What are his strengths and weaknesses?

The Application of Indirect Assessment to the Hard Drug Disruption Process

One means of disrupting the channels of drug flow is to deal with the key individuals involved in that channel. The technique of indirect assessment will be helpful if (1) individuals in the organizations responsible for the transporting or processing of drugs are known; and (2) if the circumstances in which these individuals operate is observable or has been observed.

Assessment from data on these people either on hand in the law enforcement community or specifically gathered for indirect assessment purposes could be used to better understand how key staff members of these organizations behave in particular circumstances. Such questions could then be addressed as "how might they be manipulated if their strengths and weaknesses are known" and "What kinds of approaches might be made to these individuals who are under pressure from the law enforcement community?"

The indirect assessment procedures to be utilized are based for interpretation on a psychological assessment system tried and tested over a 25-year period. The data bank contains assessments and profiles on a wide variety of subcultural groups both U.S. and foreign. The data bank includes profiles of criminals, drug addicts, actors, political elites, military,

business executives, and many other "types." The system does not depend on specialized knowledge on such questionable concepts as the "military mind" or the "criminal profile." Most behavioral scientists reject stereotypes as a psychologically meaningful categorization of behavior, rather the system recognizes the influence of environmental stress through stimulus impingement, society's influence on the individual, through its schools, neighborhoods, peer groups, etc. Thus, though there may be clusters of similar behaviors related to a particular occupation or sub-cultural group, this system permits flexibility in interpretation of these groups in an ever changing psychological environment.

The assessors participating in this study have had experience ranging over most of the subcultural profiles mentioned above and have access to appropriate profile data banks for any statistical or comparative analyses.

All individuals do not react the same to similar stimuli nor do they perceive a stimulus in the same way. By better understanding the needs and motivations of various members of drug-flow organizations, more alternatives for disrupting this traffic may become obvious. A better understanding of the individuals and groups operating the drug traffic channels will provide law enforcement personnel with potentially better predictions of how various strategies might put more effective pressure on distribution procedures and alternative routes of traffic. In addition, a study of the types of individuals associated with these drug organizations may reveal commonality of behavior and psychological sets, which could then be used more generally in the interdiction of this traffic.

Products From This Study

This study would lead to (1) assessments of key individuals in the drug traffic organizations; (2) a better picture of the general behavior and motivations of the drug trafficker behavior; (3) potential vulnerabilities of the group and the key individuals for exploitation by law enforcement personnel.

Required Assistance and Research Contribution

In order to be effective in psychological assessment of the drug traffic culture and individuals, the law enforcement community must have or be able to collect sufficiently good quality information about individuals and subgroups involved. It may be a considerable amount of unanalyzed information or data now exists that has not been appropriately exploited. Studies of files now in existence would be helpful to the assessors. It may be that certain information gathering would be required to fill the gaps on individuals or groups.

The assessors should bring to the law enforcement community skills in the assessment process, vigorous systematic analysis of available data, and skill in producing reports which would highlight approaches of vulnerabilities to the system and to the key individuals. The study should thus result in another tool to prevent the hard drugs from reaching the U.S. or allied markets.